

Duhamel

AN ADDRESS

ON THE

CENTENNIAL

OF THE

Siege of Yorktown, Va.

1781—1881.

BY

DOCTOR DUHAMEL,



WASHINGTON, D. C.

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YORKTOWN, VIRGINIA

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On the York river in full view of the beautiful waters of the Chesapeake, with its waves sparkling in the morning sun, is to be seen on a projecting point of land, Yorktown, Va.; a place memorable in American history, and near by stands the old church built over two hundred years ago, where repose the ashes of many patriot dead, who were killed during the Siege of October, 1781.

Yorktown was occupied by Cornwallis with the British Army in August, 1781, for the purpose of being near his supplies and ships, and, as he said, to make it more convenient to capture the American army in Virginia, under the youthful General Lafayette. He also occupied the opposite point (Gloucester Point,) where the British Colonel Tarlton was in command, and who was a terror to the neighboring country from his raids and acts of cruelty.

Cornwallis made several efforts to capture General Lafayette and his small force by pretended retreats, &c., but the young General was too active for him. General Anthony Wayne always managed with his troops to dash through their lines to break up their plans. Cornwallis felt so secure in this position, that he offered over a thousand men to Sir Henry Clinton who was in danger from the American and French army under Washington at New York. It was at this time that General Lafayette determined to draw his net around Cornwallis, and he directed General Wayne with the addition of some six hundred militia he obtained from the Government of Virginia, to move down the James river to be ready to form a junction with the troops from the French fleet, as he was then expecting Admiral DeGrasse and his fleet in the Chesapeake.

Cornwallis took forcible possession of the plantations in the counties adjoining Yorktown, making prisoners of the residents, but they lived to see the glorious sight when the British army marched out in the appointed field and surrendered their arms to the American army.

YORKTOWN SIEGE.

General Washington resolved to proceed south and help Lafayette to capture Cornwallis, but he had to proceed in a very careful manner to prevent Clinton at New York from reinforcing the British army in Virginia. He acted as if he were about to attack New York by way of Staten Island, but at the same time pushed the men of his army through Pennsylvania with the French forces under Count de Rouchambeau. For a time his movements were a mystery to his own army, but in a short time Sir Henry Clinton found himself out-generaled, and his friend Cornwallis, in Virginia, in a perilous position. About the same time, Lafayette

wrote to Washington urging him to move south with his army, and to put himself at the head of the combined armies, as he considered it an excellent opportunity to capture the British army in Virginia, and thanked Washington for ordering him there to make such a brilliant military achievement then in prospect.

About the first of September, the American army passed through Philadelphia and Baltimore, and though they were covered with dust and in worn-out uniforms, they were received with cheers and enthusiasm by the populace who hailed them as the defenders of the country. The French entered the next day with the dust brushed off their gay white uniforms faced with green, and their fine military bands.

Washington joined Lafayette with the army at Williamsburg on the 12th of September, having stopped on his way for a day with his staff and French officers, at his home, Mount Vernon, after an absence of *six years*.

The British army was now in a critical situation, and its retreat was cut off from the sea by the splendid French fleet which blocked up the York river.

Artillery and siege cannons were sent up by the French Admiral to the American army, and the Generals of the American army visited the French fleet and formed a plan for the siege of Yorktown. About the 1st of October the British withdrew into the town, and the Americans siezed the outworks encircling the town from river to river, and the battle commenced.

During the cannonading one shot killed three men and wounded four men near General Washington, throwing the earth on the hat of the Chaplain, Rev. Mr. Evans, who called General Washington's attention to it; the General remarked that he should take it to his home as a relic of the siege. Governor Nelson, of Virginia directed the first gun at his own house, as it was the headquarters of the British General, and offered a reward of 5£ to the soldiers for every bomb that hit the house.

A red hot shell from the French batteries struck the British ship Charon at night, and it was soon wrapped in flames, causing a vivid brightness, as other ships caught fire, while around was thunder and lightning from the numerous cannons and mortars, presenting a magnificent and sublime sight in the darkness of the night. Some of the shells were thrown over the town, and were seen to fall in the river, bursting and throwing up columns of water like monsters of the deep. The bombs from each party crossed each other in the air, in the day they looked like large black balls, but at night they looked like fiery meteors with blazing tails decending to execute their work of destruction. For several days continued assaults were made on the different lines of fortifications, and acts of bravery and gallantry were numerous, and under the personal observation of the commanding officers, and on the last day as the last line of the works were stormed, Colonel de Larneth, the Adjutant General to Lafayette, was the first to mount the parapet, he received a volley from the Hessians who defended it, and was shot through both knees, he fell back and was conveyed away by his friend, Colonel Dumas and Surgeon DuHamel, a surgeon of the French navy.

A little before day-break on the 16th, Cornwallis made a last effort to keep off the effective action of the American batteries from his dismounted works; he sent out some four hundred men under Colonel Abercrombie, and the redoubts which covered our batteries were forced, and several pieces of artillery were spiked, but the troops from the trenches drove the enemy back with loss on their part. At this time Cornwallis could not show a gun on the side of his works, and the place was no longer tenable; but rather than surrender he determined to make his escape.

Cornwallis' plan of escape from Yorktown was to attack the French and Americans at Gloucester Point before day-break; mounts his Infantry on the captured cavalry and other horses, and force his way through Maryland and Pennsylvania to New York, but a violent storm arose that night and drove his boats down the river and put a stop to his wild daring scheme. His hopes were now at an end, as his fortifications were tumbling in ruins around him, and unwilling to expose the residue of his brave men who had been so faithful in all dangers, he sent a flag of truce to Washington to suspend hostilities.

Colonel Laurens was appointed first commissioner to negotiate the surrender; he was the son of Hon. Henry Laurens, who had been sent as ambassador to Holland, but was captured and was then in the tower of London.

The terms of surrender were similar to those granted to General Lincoln a year before at Charleston, and he (General Lincoln,) arranged the surrender and recieved the British army.

The French and American armies formed two lines of over a mile in length, and the British army marched between the two, surrendering their arms which they threw in a pile with such force as to break them, such was the mortification of the men, and they were checked in the same. It was a bright and glorious day, but a day of bitter dissapointment to the English. The captured troops marched out with colors folded and drums beating a slow march. The officers were allowed their side arms and private property, and all the military and artillery were delivered to the American forces, and the marines and seamen to the French navy. The French army with Count de Rochambeau in complete uniform, and with their bands presented a splendid appearance. The Americans though not all in uniform, presented a fine soldiery air with joy beaming from their countenances. ✓

Every degree of confidence and harmony existed between the American and French, and the only spirit to excel were in exploits of bravery against the common enemy.

The British army made many brilliant exploits and victories under Cornwallis, and they almost adored him, but he should have cheerfully shared in their humiliation and disgrace, but it is said he gave himself up to vexation and remorse.

The Commander-in-chief of the allied forces expressed himself in an order of

the day,—“thanks due the brave officers and soldiers of the French and American armies!”

It was a sad sight to see Yorktown after the siege, with bodies of men and horses half covered with earth, and the fine houses riddled with cannon balls, and the rich furniture and books scattered over the ruins. The loss of men of the French army was double that of the Americans. There were eleven thousand in the British army at the commencement of the siege, and our forces in all amounted about twelve thousand six hundred.

Col. Tarlton after the surrender was mounted on a splendid horse remarkable for his fine appearance, and while riding with several French officers with whom he was to dine, he was met by a Virginia gentleman who recognized and demanded his horse, but Tarleton was reluctant to give it up; General O'Hara who was present advised him to give it up at once, which he did, and had to remount a miserable old plough horse to finish his ride, as it appears that this horse had been captured in the following manner:—At Hanover Court House there were a number of Virginia gentlemen who were there to hear the news and talk over the events of the day, a servant man came at full speed to inform them that Colonel Tarlton and his British troops were not three miles off, and in their alarm and sudden confusion to get away, each one mounted the first horse he could put his hands on, thereby returned home on horses not their own. They all escaped but one gentleman who hid himself in the chimney-way, and Colonel Tarlton helped himself to his splendid charger then in the stable.

Col. Tarlton who had done much injury to the citizens in his raids through the country, heard a Virginia lady speak in high terms of Colonel Washington, a relative of General Washington. Colonel Tarleton remarked that he would like to see Colonel Washington, she replied curtly “that he could have had that pleasure if he had looked behind him in his retreat at the battle of the cowpens.”

Next to our great American General Washington, much is due to the patriot General Lafayette by his skill for the success in capturing the British army at Yorktown. Lafayette was born near Paris, and the inheritor of a princely fortune. At eight years of age he entered the College of Louis the Great, and he was in a few years rewarded for his success in his studies. Here the lovely but ill fated Queen of France, Maria Antoinette, who was beheaded with the King during the reign of terror in France, encouraged him in his progress at College and had him promoted as an officer in the King's guard, and also aided him in obtaining money to help the Americans. He met Dr. Franklin in Paris and offered his services before he was twenty-one years old, and equipped a vessel at his own expense, arrived at Philadelphia and presented himself to Congress, “I have come!” he said, “to request two favors of this assemblage of patriots, one is that I may serve in your army!” “the other, that I receive no pay.” His services were accepted and he was commissioned as Major-General.

The American army was much in need of supplies and rations for the men, and Lafayette sent several thousand dollars to General Washington for the pur-

chase of the same. At the battle of Brandywine, Lafayette gave full evidence of his skill and bravery, as he was wounded on the first day of the battle. He continued actively employed with the army until 1779, when he returned to France and obtained further aid for America. After the war was over he returned to France. In 1789 he was elected Commander of the National Guards, and for a time checked the mob from running into those horrid excesses which were afterwards committed during the revolution. A short time after he had to fly his country for safety, but he was thrown into prison and chained by the Emperor of Austria on account of his republican principles. Several years after, Bonaparte had him set at liberty, and he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies.


In 1824 General Lafayette visited the United States and was received with great ovations by a grateful people, and hailed as their benefactor by an immense concourse of American people who remembered his former services and liberality. He returned home in 1825 in a ship fitted out by the United States and named "Brandywine," in honor of his bravery at that memorable battle.

We are to have a Centennial celebration at Yorktown, October, 1881, and let every American visit the place and imbibe some of the patriotic sentiments on that occasion to make an impression which he may keep during life. It will also teach him the lesson of the past. From amid the machinery of the politics of the present day, he may learn what was once the tone of public life. It will enlarge his patriotism and elevate his notions of public life, and call out some veneration for the dead; the patriots of those days.

Ancient and modern history does not show a parallel for those men; for nature made those men great, called as they were by their country to defend her liberties, they vindicated the rights of humanity, and on the foundation of Independence they erected this Republic.

They *voluntarily* refused the sword and sceptre, though thrust upon them, and by this sublime act they have from that time received the world's profound admiration.

*"On fame's eternal camping ground,
Their silent tents are spread;
While glory guards with solemn 'round
This bivouac of the dead."*

 NOTE —Dr. Pierre DuHamel, referred to in page 4, was a distinguished French Physician—of the family of the celebrated writer on Agriculture and Commerce, Member of the French Academy of Sciences, De Monceau Henry Lewis DuHamel—was the personal friend of the Marquis de Lafayette, and an officer of his Staff. At the close of the Revolutionary War he adopted America as his future residence, and for eminent services rendered the cause of Independence received the grant of a large tract of land in the County of Queen Ann's, State of Maryland. Dr. Wm. J. C. DuHamel, of Washington, D. C., the author of this address, and the Rev. J. Pleasonton DuHamel, of Philadelphia, are great-grand sons of the Patriot.—ED.

*Note added by the
Rev. J. P. DuHamel of Phila.*

...the bill of 1850, which was passed by the House of Representatives on the 15th of March, 1850, and which was signed by the President on the 9th of September, 1850. This bill was passed by a vote of 127 yeas and 98 nays. It was the first time since the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 that a bill of this kind had passed the House of Representatives. The bill was passed by a vote of 127 yeas and 98 nays. It was the first time since the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 that a bill of this kind had passed the House of Representatives.

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